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I think one of the best things to do as a writer is...
know your television. —*Shonda Rhimes*

CHAPTER RECAP

When it comes to television, it's a writer's world. In film, the director is king, but in television, what the writer envisions is what makes it on screen. This is why television is such an exciting medium for writers: the writer controls everything from the stories that are told to how the sets are built.

Knowing your television history is key to being a great writer. If you're writing a medical drama like *Grey's Anatomy*, then you better know the other medical dramas that have been created and why they either succeeded or failed. Notice how the pilots have changed over time and identify trends. What caused those changes? What shows were considered some of the greats, and what made them so great?

There used to be a lot of rules for writing television, particularly around established formats, such as a procedural drama. But today, with the vast amount of platforms your show can live on, any storytelling format is possible. Regardless, Shonda recommends knowing what the rules were, and are, so you know which rules you are breaking.

TAKE IT FURTHER

- Brush up on your television history. Dive back into the '70s, '80s, and '90s, and watch the notable television shows of those decades. Take note of what trends and themes were common in those television eras. Why do you think certain shows were successful? Why did some shows debut and fall flat?

SUBCHAPTERS

- ▶ Television vs. Film
- ▶ Read the News to Learn Storytelling
- ▶ Know Your Television
- ▶ Read and Dissect Scripts
- ▶ There Are No More Rules

NOTES

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02 TEACH YOURSELF TV WRITING

SHONDA RHIMES TEACHES WRITING FOR TELEVISION 9

ASSIGNMENT

► One of the best ways to learn TV writing and storytelling is to deconstruct an existing show. Pick a television show and watch and study its entire debut season. Below is a list of a few of Shonda's favorites to get you started.

How are the characters introduced? How is each episode structured? How do plot elements unfold over a season? Why is this show successful (or not successful)? Share your notes with your classmates in [The Hub](#).

- *St. Elsewhere*
- *The Crown*
- *Breaking Bad*
- *Game of Thrones*
- *The West Wing*

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